

Murtha died this week at 77, of a medical mistake.

There aren't many like him in Congress. There never were.

First of all, Murtha, an ex-Marine officer, was not the sort of fellow who needed a "handler" or a "focus group" to calculate the political tides. Instead he used three ancient tools—study, his mind, and his conscience.

As a fine essay, reprinted from Politico on these pages, documented, Murtha was famous for the Washington rituals he did not observe. When asked a question, he answered it. He did not hang with lobbyists or flacks. He did not go to parties, but got up early and went to bed early. (According to Politico, he would sometimes go home in the afternoon to listen to the BBC to get a fresh slant on U.S. foreign policy.) He did not court TV people or the Washington Post, and didn't particularly know or care who those people were.

And he didn't back down.

He wasn't always right. And he knew that. He had the courage to change his mind.

But he was, as the saying goes, a "stand-up guy." You could not blow him down with a poll or a David Broder column.

Murtha had the understated self-confidence that the rare greats in politics have. I met Mike Mansfield, briefly, once, and you felt it from him. Ditto John Stennis. I am sure that Eisenhower had it. And maybe Ella Grasso. I know I have seen and felt it in the presence of Eugene McCarthy, Ernest Hollings, and John Glenn. Some public men seem to shed their vanity as the years accumulate and they settle into their work. They begin to internalize their love of country. Instead of politics being more and more about them, it becomes more and more about service. And they go about their work with concentration and power, but minimal fuss. You felt that with Murtha. There was no posturing in the man. He looked you dead in the eye and he told you what he thought was true and needed doing.

Murtha was much in the news when he came to see us. He was known as the military's greatest friend in Congress and he had just come out for withdrawal from Iraq. I recall him as a big man in a dark blue suit. His hands were the hands of a working man. He might have been a machinist or a farmer instead of a soldier and statesman. Someone here snickered the other day that western Pennsylvania, from whence Murtha came, was "not really Pennsylvania, but Ohio." It's true in the sense that Murtha was from a hardscrabble world where people are still close to land and labor and where hard work and professionalism are what matter, not pretense, not birthright, not wealth or college degrees. It does not matter if you have a family name and an MBA from Harvard. If you want to invade Iraq, you better study the history of Iraq.

Yeah, Murtha was against abortion and for the Second Amendment and he was born in West Virginia and he owned a car wash before he got into politics. But that old Vietnam veteran could set Condoleezza Rice's head spinning and he took no guff from right-wing no-nothings. If we had 50 "Ohioans" like John Murtha in the House we would have health-insurance reform today.

Murtha liked fellow pros. But pros who were rooted in something. He got on well with the first George Bush and not at all with the second. He thought Donald Rumsfeld was nuts and Robert Gates a great man. He was a protégé of Tip O'Neill's and practiced O'Neill's adage that all politics is local (Murtha never got over the old and honorable idea that a congressman's first job is to provide for his constituents), but Murtha trusted Rahm Emanuel about as far as he could throw him.

Murtha spent his spare time visiting wounded soldiers at Bethesda Naval Hospital and Walter Reed. He did not take cameramen with him. When he traveled to Iraq, it was not a junket or a photo-op. He would tell the generals and ambassadors, "no PowerPoint," none of that stuff. Just talk to me, he would say, and tell me what is going on. And then he would go visit with the sergeants and the specialists. He took Larson under his wing, and to Iraq, early in Larson's congressional career because "he goes home at the end of the day and studies the CIA briefing books."

Murtha did not love the military as a concept, but as people. Public servants like himself. His work for them in Congress was like his work for the citizens of the 12th District of Pennsylvania. He had a job to do. He was supposed to take care of his people.

He was much man, John Murtha.

What a loss to the Congress and the country.

OUR UNCONSCIONABLE NATIONAL DEBT

HON. MIKE COFFMAN

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 3, 2010

Mr. COFFMAN of Colorado. Madam Speaker, today our national debt is \$12,519,423,725,485.39.

On January 6, 2009, the start of the 111th Congress, the national debt was \$10,638,425,746,293.80.

This means the national debt has increased by \$1,869,110,716,567.24 so far this Congress. The debt has increased \$11,887,262,624.26 since just yesterday.

This debt and its interest payments we are passing to our children and all future Americans.

TRIBUTE TO KENT M. RONHOVDE

HON. ROBERT A. BRADY

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 3, 2010

Mr. BRADY of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I rise today to share with you the life and mourn the death of a remarkable public servant who dedicated his career to serving the United States Congress. Mr. Kent M. Ronhovde died on February 19 after a valiant struggle with cancer. Kent worked for 36 years at the Congressional Research Service, starting as an entry-level attorney right after law school and rising to senior management positions in the Service.

At the time of his death, Kent was Associate Director for Congressional Affairs and Counselor to the Director. In that capacity and for the last 7 years, he was the liaison between CRS and its oversight committees in the House and Senate ensuring that CRS and its congressional overseers remained in communication over the critical issues facing the Service. Regardless of changes in congressional and committee leadership, Kent ensured that there were no changes in CRS's commitment to its core values of confidentiality, authoritativeness, non-partisanship and objectivity.

This commitment to CRS values manifested itself in Mr. Ronhovde's other duties. He

oversaw the Review Office, where all CRS products are reviewed for consistency with the dictates of objectivity, non-advocacy and non-partisanship. Kent and his office also counseled CRS employees and managers on the delicate questions surrounding outside speaking and writing and compliance with CRS and Library of Congress regulations and policies designed to ensure that all CRS staff maintain the ability to be seen as impartial and objective in their work for Congress. These are questions whose sensitivity is matched by their importance to CRS and to the Congress. Kent understood well the absolute necessity of CRS maintaining its reputation for objectivity. Whether reviewing a report or memo, determining the propriety of an outside activity of a CRS staff member or advising the Director of CRS on a policy question, Kent exercised the good judgment and discretion demanded by such sensitive questions, questions with potentially profound consequences for the institution.

Mr. Ronhovde's devotion to CRS' mission to serve Congress and commitment to its values infused his entire career. He joined CRS' American Law Division after graduation from Georgetown Law School in 1974, law school having been interrupted by service in Vietnam as an intelligence officer. In the American Law Division, Kent rose through the attorney ranks, became a section head in 1985 and Assistant Chief of the division in 1986. During this time, he also earned a Masters of Public Administration from American University. Kent became a senior manager in the CRS Director's Office in 1996 and assumed his latest position in 2003. His portfolio in that position—in addition to the committee liaison and policy compliance responsibilities I recounted above—touched on the most important and consequential issues facing CRS. Director Daniel P. Mulholland stated that "Kent provided exceptional service to the Congress and to CRS. Colleagues throughout the Library and CRS admired his careful and deliberate judgment, his insightful examination of the question at hand and his sense of equanimity and balance. The Service and I could not have had a better counsel."

CRS and the Congress have lost a wise and devoted public servant. We extend our deepest sympathies to Kent's wife, Juliet, daughters Kristin and Brooke and their families and to all his friends and colleagues in CRS.

COMMEMORATING THE LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF FRANKIE DRAYTON THOMAS

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 3, 2010

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Madam Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the life and achievements of my dear friend Frankie Drayton Thomas, who died on February 27, 2010, in West Palm Beach, Florida from a sudden heart attack. She was 81 years old. My thoughts and prayers go out to her son, James Thomas of New Carrollton, Maryland; daughter, local attorney Lola Mosley; sister, Lillie B. Drayton; brother, James Drayton; and the rest of her family and friends at this most difficult time.